

Some observations

Pap 2 March 18th
1826

on
Calomel

or

(according to the new Chemical nomenclature)

the

Trichloride of Mercury.

By

John J. Goss

of
Punxsie.

Paper March 18th
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To John D. Godman M.D.

Whose Splendid talents as a Teacher, and
Kindness to me as a Man,

Compel me, in justice to my own feelings
to express, even here, my admiration
of His exalted Medical attainments,
my profound respect for his private Virtues,
and my unfeigned gratitude for his friendship

Philadelphia March 8th 1826 J. P. Gomez

Calomel.

This article I have been involuntarily led from a
conviction of its great importance as a remedial agent.

The limits which I have prescribed for these
observations, prevent me from entering into an his-
torical account of this article; nor do I think it
necessary to investigate the propriety of the various
appellations, by which, at different periods it has
been known.

It is my intention to speak in a brief manner
of its component parts, its sensible qualities, and its
application to some of the many diseases, which, when
judiciously administered it seems destined to over-
come.

Mercury is susceptible of combination with two
proportions of oxygen. When one proportional of Mercury
and one of oxygen are united they form the black oxide, of
which Calomel is the Muriake, or it is the union of one

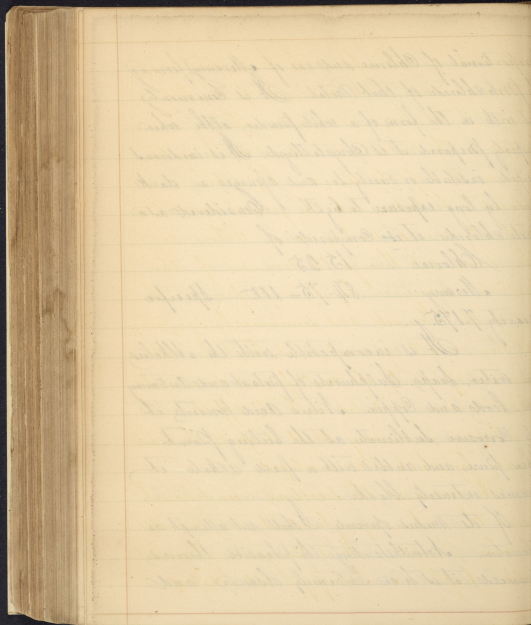
proportional of Chlorine and one of Mercury forming
the protochloride of that Metal. It is commonly
met with in the form of a white powder, altho when
properly prepared it is Crystallized. It is inodorous
insipid, insoluble or nearly so, and assumes a dark
blue by long exposure to light. Considered as a
protochloride it is composed of

Chlorine . . . 15.25

Mercury . . . 84.75 = 100. Specific
gravity 7.175.

It is incompatible with the Alkalies,
lime water, Soaps, Sulphurates of potash and Antimony
iron, lead, and Copper. Nitric Acid converts it
into Corrosive sublimate at the boiling point.
When pure, and rubbed with a fixed alkali it
becomes intensely black.

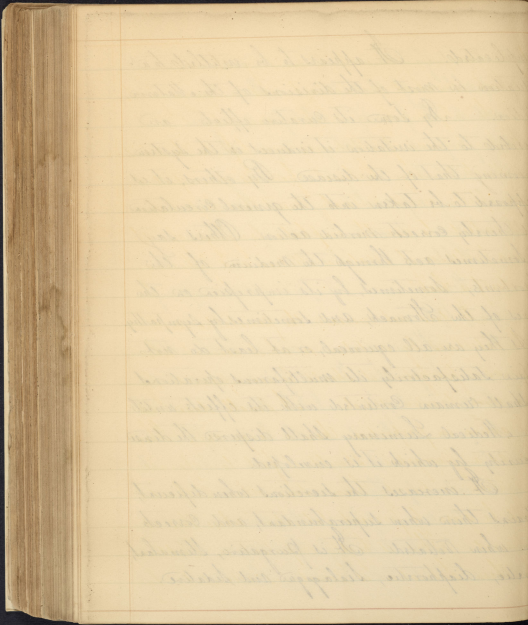
Of its Modus operandi, I shall not attempt an
explanation. Notwithstanding the plausible theories
advanced, it is to me extremely obscure and



Complicated. It appears to be entitled to a
situation in most of the divisions of the Materia
Medica. By some its Curative effects are
ascribed to the irritation it induces in the system
overcoming that of the disease. By others, it is
supposed to be taken into the general Circulation
and thereby corrects morbid action. Others say
it sometimes acts through the medium of the
absorbents, sometimes, by its impression on the
nerves of the Stomach, and sometimes, by Sympathy.

As they are all equivocal, or at least do not
explain Satisfactorily its multifarious operations
I shall remain contented with its effects until
some Medical Luminary shall disperse the dense
obscurity by which it is enveloped.

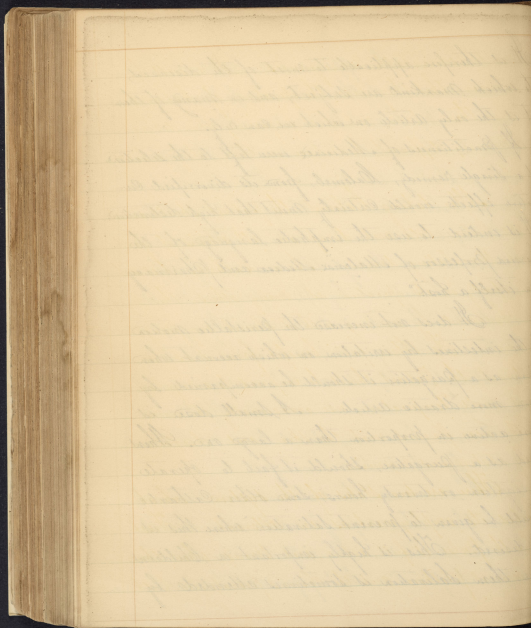
It increases the secretions when deficient,
restrains them when superabundant, and corrects
them when vitiated. It is Purgative, Stimulant,
diuretic, diaphoretic, Stalagogue and Sedative.



It is therefore applicable to most of the diseases,
to which Mankind are subject, and in many of them
it is the only article on which we can rely.

If practitioners of Medicine were left to the selection
of a single remedy, Calomel, from its diversified Cu-
rative effects, would certainly merit that high distinction.
It is indeed to use the emphatic language of the
German professor of Materia Medica and Pharmacy
"in itself a host."

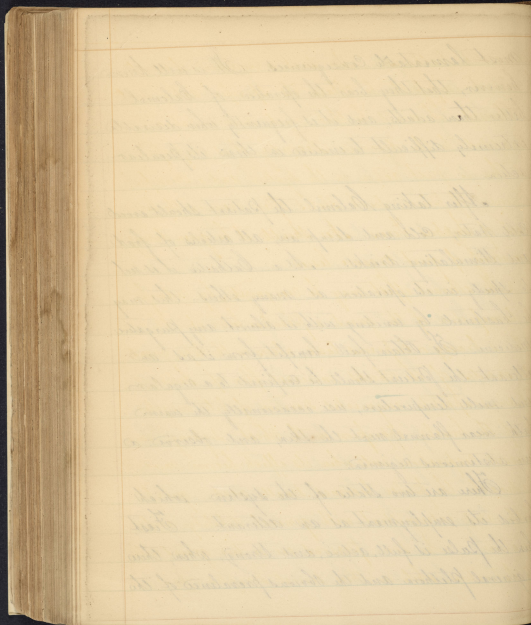
It does not increase the peristaltic motion
of the intestines by irritation, on which account when
given as a purgative it should be accompanied by
some more drastic article. A small dose is
more active in proportion than a large one. When
used as a purgative, should it fail to operate
in eighteen or twenty hours, some other Cathartic
should be given to prevent salivation where this is
not desired. This is highly important in Children
as in them salivation is sometimes attended by



most lamentable consequences. It is well known however, that they bear the operation of Calomel better than adults, and it is frequently when desirable extremely difficult to induce in them its peculiar action.

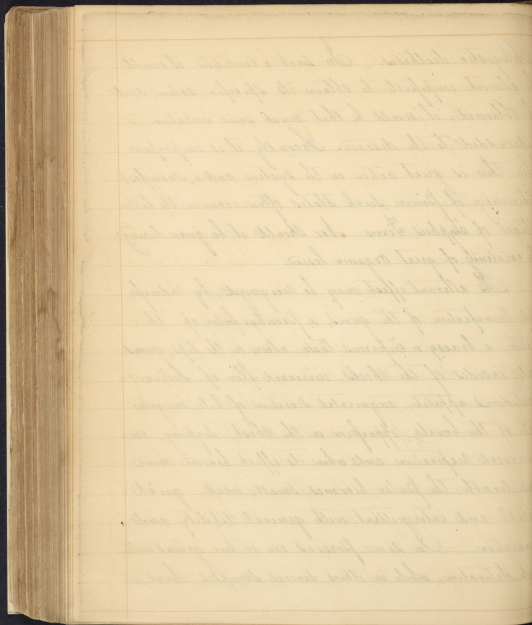
After taking Calomel the patient should avoid Cold Water, Cold and damp air, all articles of food and Stimulating drinks. As a Cathartic it is not so speedy in its operation as many others - this may be hastened by uniting with it almost any purgative medicine. To obtain full benefit from it as an alterant, the patient should be confined to a regular and mild temperature, use occasionally the warm bath, wear flannel next the skin, and observe a very abstemious regimen.

There are two States of the system which forbid its employment as an alterant. First, when the Pulse is full, active, and strong, when there is general plethora and the obvious prevalence of the



phlogistic diathesis. In such a condition it would be almost impossible to obtain its specific action, and if obtained, it would be that much more irritation superadded to the disease. Secondly, it is improper when there is great action in the system and a manifest deficiency of power; such states often occur in the latter stages of Typhus Fevers. Nor should it be given during the existence of great organic lesion.

Its alterant effect may be recognised, by redness and tumefaction of the gums, a peculiar flavor of the breath, a brassy or cupreous taste, ulcers on the lips, gums, and insides of the cheeks, increased flow of saliva, fetidulous appetite, augmented secretion of bile, irregular state of the bowels, oppression in the chest, sighing, embarrassed respiration, and when its effects become more considerable the pulse becomes, small, weak, quick, variable and intermittent, with general debility and inaction. In some persons one or two grains will reach saturation, while in others several scruples have

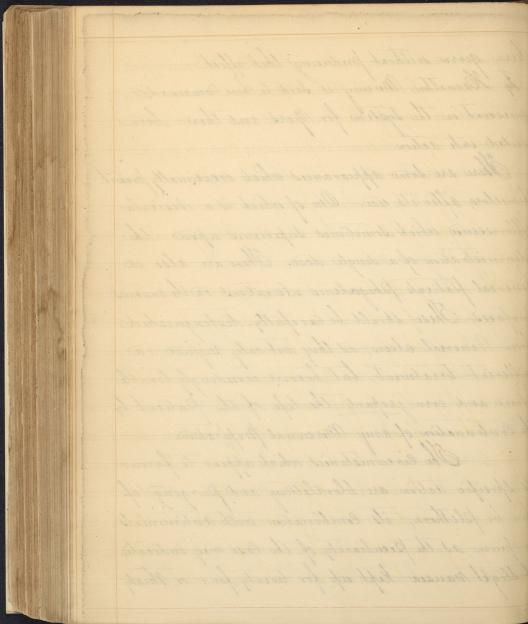


been given without producing that effect.

By Kamethos, Mercury is said to have remained quiescent in the system for years, and then been excited into action.

There are some appearances which occasionally present themselves after its use. One of which is a vesicular effluescence which sometimes supervenes upon the administration of a single dose. There are also in several patients phagadenic ulcerations on the mucous surfaces. These should be carefully distinguished from Venereal ulcers, as they not only require a different treatment, but become exceedingly troublesome and even jeopard the life of the patient by the continuation of any Mercurial preparation.

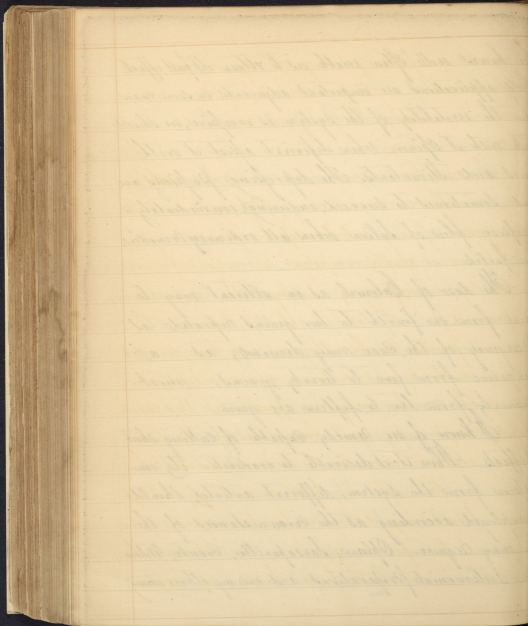
The circumstances which appear to favour its specific action are, bloodletting and purging if there be plethora, its combination with antimonials or opium as the peculiarity of the case may indicate. A slight nausea kept up for twenty four or thirty



ten hours will often enable us to obtain its full effect. Cold applications are important adjuncts in some cases. When the irritability of the system is excessive, we should combine with it Opium, when deficient assist it with Tinct and Stimulants. The depressing passions are said sometimes to succeed, inducing, immediately a profuse flow of saliva, when all ordinary remedies have failed.

The dose of Calomel as an alterant may be varied from one fourth to two grains, repeated as the urgency of the case may demand; as a Purgative from five to twenty grains, most commonly from ten to fifteen are given.

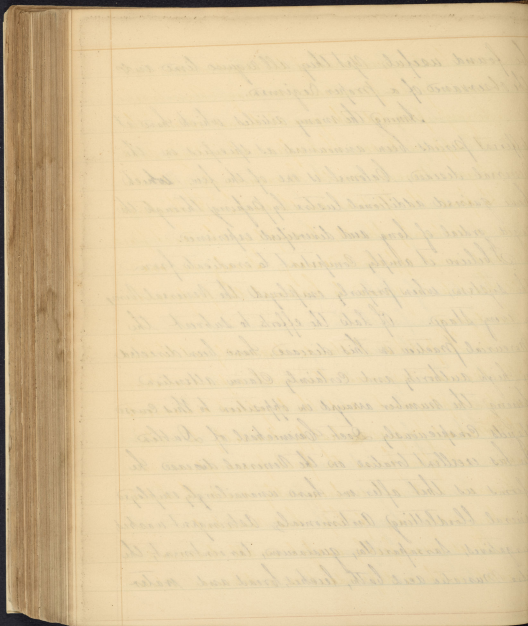
I know of no remedy capable of cutting short its effects. Where it is desirable to eradicate its impregnation from the system, different articles should be employed according as the circumstances of the case may require. Opium, Sarsaparilla, Cicuta, Mercurius, Antimonial preparations and many others may



be found useful, yet they all require time and the observance of a proper regimen.

Among the many articles which have at different periods been announced as specifics in the Venereal disease, Calomel is one of the few, which have gained additional luster by passing through the rigid ordeal of long and diversified experience.

I believe it amply competent to eradicate from the system, when properly employed the Venereal Virus in every Stage. Of late the efforts to subvert the Mercurial practice in this disease, have been directed by high authority and certainly claim attention. Among the number arrayed in opposition to this course stands conspicuously Doct. Carmichael of Dublin. In his excellent treatise on the Venereal disease he informs us that after we have unavailingly employed general bloodletting, Antimonials, Astringent washes, Purgatives, Sarsaparilla, quaiacum, tar ointment, the Nitro Muscatic acid bath, leeches, bread and water



fractures, blisters, ointment of tartarized antimony
and division of the pericostum, we may obtain benefit
from Mercury: provided the general disease is on the
wane! It appears to me, that after exhausting such
a Catalogue, Mercury would be exceedingly apt to
find the patient on the wane. If the object
be, as it certainly should, to employ the least pain-
ful and most effectual remedy, surely no one
would hesitate in giving to Salomel the preference
in this disease.

In Hepatitis it stands deservedly at the head
of all Medical resources. Universal experience sanc-
tions its employment, and the brightest ornaments
of the Medical profession testify decidedly to its
efficacy. It often forms the first prescription in
this disease, and not unfrequently averts the fatal
flow when every ray of hope has vanished.

It is manifestly useful in all diseases
connected with, or dependant on a depraved state

of the hepatic functions.

It is chiefly resorted to in all Fevers, where Purgatives are indicated; but it is in Bilious Fever that it displays most obviously its superiority.

In Hydrocephalus it is of the first Consideration, and when effusion has taken place it is the only Remedy with which we can hope to succeed.

In Cynanche Trachealis it is almost exclusively confided in by some practitioners.

In Colica pictorum, it forms the basis of our hopes of success.

In Paralysis we find it recommended by high authority as deserving a trial after all other Remedies have failed.

In Cholera Morbus, Dysentery, Diarrhoea, Epilepsy and very many other diseases, taken alone or with some of its ordinary Concomitants, furnishes us with the most hopeful means of restoring health.

It would be no difficult matter to

extend this Catalogue much further; but as I
am on several accounts precluded from entering
minutely into details, I shall here close my remarks
on this Subject, Conscious, that to do it justice re-
quires an abler hand.

In taking my leave of this University
I beg permission to be indulged in offering, my
humble, but sincere acknowledgments, to the distinguished
Professors, for the benefits I have derived from their
invaluable Lectures.

Altho' my lot is cast far hence,
the pleasing recollection of pursuing my Studies here,
and the facilities so amply provided to advance
them, will be to me an unfailing source of delightful
recollection.

If from the rich profusion of Medical
knowledge, which has flown so copiously from the
several departments, I shall have treasured up
principles, which I may in future apply to the

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alleviation of suffering humanity, then shall I have
attained the primary object of my most ardent desires.
How should I be proud of being recognized a worthy
son of the University of Pennsylvania.

John F. Jones
Philadelphia March 8th 1826.

J. C. Case